

Gore Vidal (far right) enjoys the halcyon days of the late 40's in the creative company of (left to right) ballerina Tanaquil Le Clerc, novelist Donald Windom, painter Buffie Johnson and playwright Tennessee Williams. (Photo by Karl Bessinger)



had just appeared on the scene . . . and Mailer, Capote and I were publishing our first books. It was all very lively. We were all traveling about, to Rome and Paris particularly . . . Very few automobiles on the streets in those days. Life was much easier . . . less crowded.

J: What do you think of the youth of today?

V: I notice they have trouble talking, which in turn reflects the fact that they've never learned to read and write. I think that's a pity, but that's a condition of the society now. This is the first generation brought up on television. If you don't learn how to read and think between the ages one and ten, you'll never get the knack of it. That's the period, pre-puberty, when they spend most of their time looking at the television set and they don't get into the habit of reading. They usually come from families where no one reads a book, or thinks thoughts, or talks about anything other than the daily interest. So I find it quite disturbing when I get out on campuses and find that not only have they not read anything, but they're not capable of expressing themselves. They can't ask a question, they can't put together a sentence . . . it's too complicated for them . . . their vocabulary becomes smaller, I think, with each passing year. The degree of intelligence per generation is, I'm sure, exactly the same, but the general range, particularly the politically active young that I deal with, is not overwhelmingly articulate.

J: Is there anything you've wanted to do, but haven't been able to do yet?

V: Yeah, take off the eggs.

J: You cook?

V: Yes. Two boiled eggs. Everybody should know how to cook.

J: I wanted to ask you, is there anything you want to do? Any secret desire that you have?

V: Retire.

J: To retire?

V: To retire, yep . . . which I haven't done yet. No more interviews, no more going on television . . . that's

wise or not, since I wasn't there. I think the strategy should always be cool, and not self-destructive.

J: Women's Liberation?

V: I've written at great lengths on that. I'm all for the breaking down of the sexual stereotypes. That was the theme of my book, *Myra Breckenridge*. Much of the trouble the country is in, is through the misapprehension of the sexual role. The United States is filled with fat, flabby men who think of themselves as Gary Cooper—two-fisted he-men, when actually it's a country of beer-drinking fat men looking at television. American men are the fattest in the world, incidentally, and certainly the weakest physically. Then they have all this *machismo* poured into their poor fat heads, and the result is . . . that's why we're in Vietnam.

J: Drugs?

V: I'm for legalizing *all* drugs . . . selling them at cost with the normal restriction that we have for the sale of alcohol. In other words, a ten-year-old would not be sold heroin. Everything should be clearly labeled as to what the contents are, what they will do to you, and the speed with which you will become addicted and die . . . with the hard drugs. This would eliminate the pushers, it would eliminate crime, and eventually it would eliminate drug addiction. This is the only way to handle that problem.

J: What do you think of the "death" of Hollywood?

V: Couldn't have happened to a nicer town.

J: Have you seen any good movies lately?

V: Yes, quite a few good movies around. I liked *Sunday Bloody Sunday*. What upsets most of those people who write for newspapers, and therefore feel qualified to write about the

to that one core. How could a nice, manly, Jewish doctor have an affair with a boy who doesn't seem to be wearing woman's clothes?" They just couldn't get it.

J: What did you think of *A Clockwork Orange*?

V: I was a little ambivalent about *A Clockwork Orange*. It does not exploit the very thing it seems to despise, which is violence. Does it believe violence is innate in our disposition, or is violence encouraged by a wrong environment? This is always a problem, and I don't think the movie was very satisfactory in its approach to that. But just taken as a movie, frame by frame, joke by joke, it was very beguiling.

J: Did you see *Valley of the Dolls*?

V: No. It's a little too high-brow for my taste. I find Jacqueline Suzanne and Lady Strauss very difficult writers. But one day, when I'm older, I mean to get to them.

J: Did you see Tennessee Williams' new play?

V: No. I think Tennessee is going through a phase that writers do when they get older . . . becoming bored with narrative or with plot. So you just write the aria that interests you and you leave out the thrust of a plot, which does seem rather simple-minded since there are only a dozen or so essential means of propelling a story. I think Tennessee is going into his *Tempest* stage, the way Shakespeare did. The plot just goes out the window, but then, of course, audience goes right out the window after it because they will not sit still just for arias.

J: What do you think of the music today?

V: I try not to hear it.

J: Oh, come on. There's some incredible music around.

V: I don't know. It all seems so derivative. I remember when Bob



BUFFIE JOHNSON

Triple Goddess, oil on linen,
50" x 60", 1975

LANDMARK GALLERY

photo by Tracy Boyd

Opening Reception
Saturday, September 19, 1981
4:00 to 6:00 pm
Exhibition continues
through October 14

Much Love To you Darling
Buffie

BUFFIE JOHNSON RETROSPECTIVE

"By symbolizing the Great Goddess with flowers and the life/death cycle with plants in the transcendentalist tradition, and by painting large so that we are surrounded by these images for contemplation, their borders reaching beyond our fields of vision, Johnson brings us up close to the heart of religious emotion."

April Kingsley, "The Primal Plants of Buffie Johnson" in *Art International*, Nov.-Dec. 1980.

LANDMARK GALLERY

469 Broome Street New York, N.Y. 10013 966-1173

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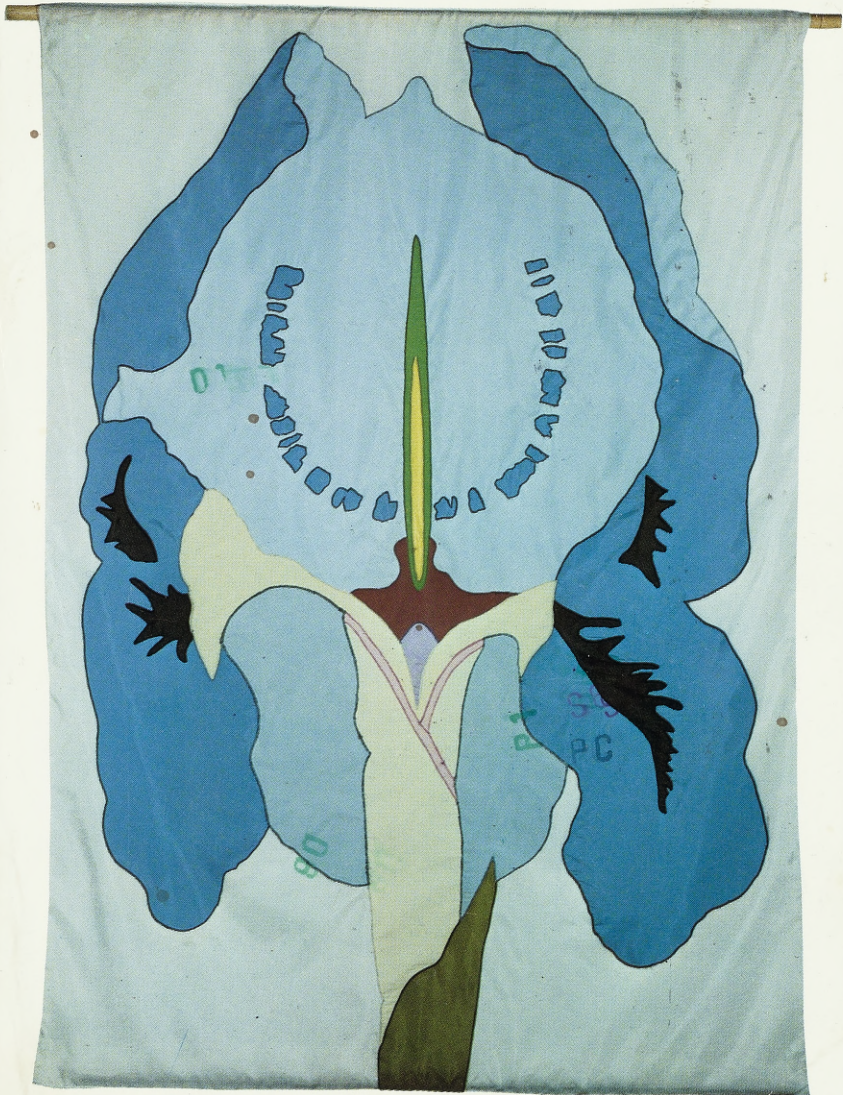
BUFFIE JOHNSON

One-woman show/paintings 1968-1973
November 10-December 1, 1973

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gallery

127 Greene Street
New York

Hi, darling, Terribly busy
with these announcements, 500
of them and Max is sending out
2000 (To museums and the like)
it makes one feel important for
about a minute. Then good
sense tells me how little it
means. One must not care. That's
why all my friends who made it
drink a little a day. Love Biffie



Buffie Johnson

Blue Iris

BICENTENNIAL BANNERS

Buffie Johnson

Blue Iris



Dearest Sari - Sorry I have neglected you so shamefully. Everything is alright again. I'm so glad everything is going so well for you. It sounds as if you were coming into your room again. We moved into the loft designed for me to paint in. I haven't had the bread to do over the living loft. I'm busy writing on "The Goddess and Her Sacred Animals". It seems to be the hottest subject. Also am doing Goddess articles (excerpts from book for "Heresies", "holy unique" & "Chrysalis" a Calif. periodical. Tracy

One of twenty banners in a signed, limited edition of 100 banners in nylon appliqué, produced by CHUCK LEVITAN, INC., WORKS OF ART, 42 Grand Street, New York City 10013. © 1976 Johnson.

helping with books & article. Love Buffie



Sara K. Arledge
1842 Rose Villa Ave
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EVE AS INITIATOR

Most people are probably familiar with the story of Creation as it is told in the Old Testament, but few of us are aware that in Genesis the account is very different, not to say contradictory, accounts of the creation. In the

102 Greene Street
New York, NY 10012
November 13, 1982

First Philosophical account, man and woman are created Dear Sarie, ~~at the same~~ or less simultaneously. This version can

Well this time I really am coming out (God is willing) early to California and I'll visit Charlotte Willson Mounts in St. Helena and you for three days, if you'll have me in Santa Cruz towards the end of January. ~~adise thus takes us into the world~~

All is well with me. I've been working very intensely on the book and I will send you a peice on Eve as Initiator, which I must rewrite and clarify the gnostic part. This ~~should~~ give you an idea anyway of the sort of thing I'm writing. ~~Although~~, the rest is not as feminist as this is. Afterall, ~~we~~ have had to labor under this portrayal of themselves for some 4,000 years. ~~we are told that Adam was created and after him all the~~

I am beginning to paint again and it is a wonderful feeling. I had forgotten, however, how hard it is to start after an interruption. I have arthritis in my thumb since a couple of months ago, making it hard to write or paint. I go to a Chinese doctor and it is somewhat better. Their methods take a long time but are better than western medicine. Do write.

Love,

Buffy

P.S. All your letters go to the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, where my life and friends are being collected.

EVE AS INITIATOR

Most people are probably familiar with the story of Creation as it is told in the Old Testament, but few of us are aware that in Genesis there are two distinctly different, not to say contradictory, accounts of the Creation. In the first **PHILOSOPHICAL** account, man and woman are created by the Lord more or less simultaneously. This version can be seen illustrated in a vignette in *Vigilanius*, a very early Spanish manuscript, dated 976 A.D.. It pictures Adam and Eve and the serpent all gathered under the shade of the tree in the garden of Eden. Paradise thus takes us into the world of plants and animals, a plantation enlivened by things that sprout from the earth. In the midst of this grove is the serpent, an earth creature enjoying its natural habitat.* Eve is there at the heart of the drama. She represents none other than the Lady of the Plants and Mistress of Animals.

In the second chapter a vastly different version appears. Here we are told that Adam was created and after him all the lesser animals. Then, after he has helped the Lord to name the animals he confesses to feeling lonely. The animals do not fulfill his need for companionship. So, to please Adam, the Lord fashions Eve from one of Adam's ribs. This version effectively conveys the creator's low regard for woman.

*C.G.Jung, Aion Vol. IX, p. 245

As Frazer in discussing the second account points out, "The Lord hardly attempts to hide his deep contempt for women, the lateness of her creation, the irregular and undignified manner of it -- made out of a piece of her lord and master, after all the lower animals sufficiently mark the low opinion he held of her nature; and in the sequel his misogynism as we may fairly call it, takes a still darker tinge, when he ascribes all the misfortunes and sorrows of the human race to the credulous folly and unbridled appetite of its first mother. "No fair minded man or self respecting woman could read this without dismay."

a tone, almost of gaiety
By contrast, in the idyllic garden of the first narrative, ~~a tone almost of gaiety~~ a tone almost of gaiety is struck, though a veil of mystery lies beneath the brightly colored picture of life in an age of innocence.

A theme of this creation story is that of initiation; the secret knowledge of life which is shared by Eve and the serpent of wisdom. Initiation is an introduction into the mysteries, involving a symbolic death and a rebirth. The ~~INITIATORY~~ initiatory process is described in detail in the situation presented in the first account in Genesis.

"In the midst of the garden grew the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and God had forbidden man to eat of its fruit saying: 'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'" *

The death of which God warns is that which is experienced by the initiate approaching the path of knowledge. The serpent

*Old Testament, Genesis 2.9,

explains the symbolic death to Eve:

"Ye shall not surely die:
For God doth know that in
The day ye eat thereof, then
your eyes shall be opened
And ye shall be as gods knowing
Good and Evil."*

The conventional view, that the serpent was cunning, and the woman credulous; that he persuaded her to eat of the fatal fruit, and that she in turn gave it to Adam who ate also, shows no understanding of the true nature of arcane sacred knowledge. The very words of the serpent are those of a psychopomp.

"Ye shall not surely die;...
Your eyes shall be opened"***

This is a direct reference to the spiritual transformation resulting from participation in the mystery religions.

The serpent, it should be remembered always speaks to Eve, never to Adam. It is Eve who accepts the perils of the ritual transformation, the dangers attendant are the rite of passage and She fears death as a consequence of her choice. And by following a dangerous path that promises a wondrous prize, Eve shows courage and initiative. Her actions do not bespeak a person who is timid credulous or easily swayed.

In the patriarchal version, Adam has been exonerated of the heavy burden of guilt heaped upon Eve. The idea that he is so easily beguiled by Eve does him little credit. Yet this fiction of the male as putty in the hands of the female

*Old Testament, Genesis 2.9

**Old Testament, Genesis 3,4,and 5

Matrifocal stage p. 4 1st paragraph

sent like thought

moon + women's menses p. 6

menstrual cycle 2 par. p. 6

is perpetuated to this day.

Its unwitting base can be traced to the matrifocal stage as reflected in the image of the uninitiated male who REMAINS SUBSERVIENT TO the matriarchal pairing of woman and serpent as givers of life.

These two contrasting versions of the same story graphically show how hostility to natural symbols engenders unnatural symbols. Thus the perversion of the notion of Eve created from Adam's rib (a parallel to Athena taken out of Zeus's ^{HEAD}) contrasts with the natural symbology of the serpent as guide and initiator to death and rebirth. This became a characteristic of the patriarchal spirit. Although in the inner sense it fails since the matriarchal character of the natural symbol seems naturally to reassert itself again and again. Yet the persistence of the patriarchal attack subdues the Goddess religion and places women in a subservient position.

"A main theme of Greek myth", according to Graves and Patai, "is the gradual reduction of women from sacred beings to chattels." Similarly Jehovah punishes Eve for causing the Fall of Man. . . just as the Greeks made woman responsible for man's unhappy lot by adapting Hesiod's fable of Pandora's jar from which the 'foolish' woman. . . let loose the combined spirits of sickness, old age and vice". Pandora means All Gifts -- it should be observed that it was also a title of the creatress, Eve. The parallel with Eve is significant,

5

the Old Testament follows the new patriarchal order of both northern neighbors and the Greeks.*

The snake thereby also becomes an inverted and misleading symbol. It is well known that the god of an old religion reappears often as the devil of a new one. If the new religion cannot find a way to incorporate the gods of the old faith, they were cursed. Just as the serpent as principle deity was reviled. The confusion arose from the idea that the curse was directed at the snake as such instead of at the form of the religion it represented. Jung remarks that the snake surpassed Adam in cleverness and could outwit him being older than he and evidently equipped by God with a superhuman intelligence, like that of the son of God who took over the role of Satan. Just as man culminates in the idea of light and a good God above, so below he rests on a dark and evil principle.** This becomes a warped and twisted substitute for the Great Mother viewed as dark and terrible on one side and light and life-giving on the other.

π To the ancients the curvilinear form of the serpent suggested running water. Water was sacred; not only did it slake the thirst, it was obviously essential to vegetation even before the dawn of plant cultivation. As an emblem of water the snake is a powerful suggestion of the earth decaying and reviving, and Eve Herself is Lady of the Plants.

The idea that the serpent renews itself and may live

*R. Graves and R. Patai, Hebrew Myths, 1966, p. 15

**C.G. Jung

6
forever by the simple means of sloughing its skin has been shared by many cultures. The notion that it cheated man of immortality is present in the epic of Gilgamesh, a tale far older than the Genesis story. After his harrowing in hell ^{or} Gilgamesh returns with the herb of immortality (a leaf of the Tree). He lays it on the ground in order to drink from a spring and a little snake slides out and eats the leaf. In this manner humans were robbed of the gift of everlasting life.

The greatest bond between the Goddess and the snake was their shared ability to be reborn; She through Her lunar ^{CAPACITY} ^{MONTHLY} ^{CYCLE THAT CORRESPONDED TO THE MOON} ^{CAPACITY} ^{SHED} periodicity, and the serpent for its ability to slough its skin and become a new creature. In this ^{THE SERPENT} respect ~~it~~ represents an essential aspect of the Great Mother; COLON immortality.

> In the Genesis story Eve's name is itself disputed. In the language of Genesis, she is called Hawwah, meaning Mother of all Living.

W. Robertson Smith in Kinship and Marriage writes that the name Hawwah is connected with the root meaning "life" rather than "living". The name is a personification of the idea of kinship thought of as consisting in descent from a common mother.*

An ancient interpretation first adopted by Williamsen** and other modern scholars connects Eve (Hawwah) with the

*W. Robertson Smith, Kinship and Marriage

**S.H. Bennett, ERE, Eve Vol. 1 p. 607b

7

Semetic words for serpent. It has been given fresh significance through the discovery of the name on a leaden Punic devotional tablet. The first line reads, "O Lady, Goddess, Queen"; it is addressed to an underworld deity identified with Hawwah.

The revival of interest in the Gnostic faith of early Christianity stems in part from the recent finds of some 52 texts at Nag Hammadi.

In her recently published book, The Gnostic Gospels, Elaine Pagels writes "early interpretations had pondered the meaning of certain Biblical passages -- for example the saying in Proverbs that "God made the world in Wisdom" -- could Wisdom be the feminine power in which God's creation was conceived? According to one teacher, the double meaning of the terms conception as physical and intellectual suggests this possibility: the image of thought (ennoia) is feminine, since. . . (it) is a power of conception.* "The Apocalypse of Adam" discovered at Nag Hammadi tells of a feminine power who wanted to conceive by herself.

from the nine muses, one separated away, she came to a high mountain and spent time seated there, so that she fulfilled her desire and became pregnant.**

The poet, Valentinus, whose teachings founded one of the Gnostic sects, speaks of Wisdom as "the great creative power from whom all things originate, often called Eve, Mother of All Living..." Followers of Valentinus and Marcus therefore

*Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, p. 54

**Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, p. 54

CUT 8

prayed to the Mother as the Mystical, eternal Silence and to Grace, She who is before all things, and to incorruptable Wisdom for insight (Gnosis).³³ Pagels then quotes a remarkable Gnostic poem, "Thunder, Perfect Mind", which discloses a revelation uttered by a feminine power.*

I am the first and the last
I am the honored one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one
I am the wife and the virgin.
I am the mother and the daughter. . .
I am she whose wedding is great,
And I have not taken a husband. . .
I am strength and I am fear. . .
I am foolish and I am wise
I am Goddess and I am one whose
God is great. 49

The Gnostics explain the Genesis phrase "male and female he made them" means, as the Gnostics saw it, "the male and the female elements together constitute the finest production of the Mother, Wisdom. These sources describe God as dual, whose nature includes both masculine and feminine.

Indeed, the Gnostics believed that Yaweh had been created by the Mother to administer the universe.** All the documents quoted by Pagels are from those texts that were edited out of the final selection for the Bible probably as late as 200 A.D., which effectively removed all the feminine imagery for the Godhead.

When Yaweh took over he proclaimed himself a jealous God. He ordered Adam in these words, "from every tree you may eat, but from the tree which is in the midst of Paradise do not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will surely

eat

*Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, p. xvii
**Pagel, The Gnostic Gospels, p. 57

die." But the serpent was wiser than all the other animals in Paradise and he persuaded Eve saying, "on the day you eat from the tree which is in the midst of Paradise, the eyes of your mind will be opened." And Eve, recognizing the serpent as the earlier and superior deity, took the serpent's advice. . . . she ate, she also gave to Adam to eat.

Eve then discovered that the Lord had deceived them; his threat was an empty one; they did not die. Moreover the serpent's promise came true; their eyes were opened.

Berger Pearson notes that an Aramaic pun is used that equates the serpent with the instructor. While another text makes a four way pun that includes Hawah (Eve) who instead of beguiling Adam, instructs and gives him new life.

Pista Sophia, "wisdom" or knowledge, sent her daughter, Zoe or "life", who is called Eve, as an instructor to Adam, and She then raised him from his material condition. In the Hypostasis of Archons, Eve is equated with the serpent principle. Adam announces that Eve gave him birth; She is the physician and the female spiritual principle come to instruct them.

This varied but consistent testimony strengthens the claim that Eve is not the lowly handmaiden of the patriarchal revision but in herself, along with the serpent, a guide and initiator and as such a manifestation of the Great Mother.

102 Greene Street
New York, N.Y.
10012

March 18, 1984

Dear Sari:

Thanks so much for your enclosures. I'm so sorry I didn't get a chance to see you while I was there. I had to be very careful, having just gotten pneumonia, not to attempt too much. You were the first bohemian I ever met and I was as astonished by you as you were by me. I will enclose an introduction to my book which the painter, Sam Francis who I think is one of the greatest painters of our day and who has become terribly rich through it, is starting a press and wants to publish my book. He says he has hired the finest designer of books on the West Coast, and it will be beautifully done. I said "yes, I will consider that, if I can also have a regular publisher as well, and Thames and Hudson, of London, have always been interested in my project. They publish, among many other things, archeological books, and books on or related to The Great Goddess, aside from being highly respected, they also do beautiful layouts. So I am hurrying to get the book finished. Keep in touch and let me know what you think.

Love,

Buffy